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THE HISTORY OF THE WEST IS A GLORIOUS ONE, AND THE TERRIBLE CIVIL WAR MEANT DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE! TO THE SETTLERS, IT MEANT PESTILENCE, FAMINE, AND NEEDLESS BLOODSHED! BUT TO THE SCORPION AND HIS GUN-RAMMERS IT MEANT THE ASSASSINING OF RICH PICKINGS OF THE BEHEGGED TOWNS, COULD EVEN BLACK DIAMOND AND DAVE CROCKETT... FAMOUS LAW-FIGHTER, WHOSE GUNS ONCE ENFORCED ORDER IN BULLET-RIDDEN FRONTIER TOWNS, SAVE THE WEST FROM THE SURPRISE...

RETURN of the SCORPION

THAT BURNING WAGON'S HEADING STRAIGHT AT US! GET READY TO DUCK...AND FIGHT BACK!

LOOK OUT! IT'S GONNA CRASH!



THE BOMBARDMENT OF FORT SUMTER, IN THE HARBOR OF CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA BY THE CONFEDERACY OPENED THE CIVIL WAR ON APRIL 12, 1861.



WHEN THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT RECALLED ITS WESTERN GARRISONS, THE SETTLERS WERE LEFT UNPROTECTED AGAINST THE PERILS OF THE FRONTIER...

SO LONG, LOOTENANT... GUESS WE WON'T BE SEEIN' YOU AGAIN!

WE'LL BE AT THE MERCY OF EVERY OWLHOOT IN THIS TERRITORY! I TELL YUH, WITHOUT THE ARMY, WE'RE ALL DONE FOR!



WITHIN DAYS, THE SETTLEMENTS BECAME SCENES OF RAIDING AND TERROR! OUTLAWS, FIGURING THEY HIT A BONANZA, ROBBED AND LOOTED...

OKAY, MISTER! RAISE YER HOOKS!

DON'T SHOOT! I'M UNARMED!



AND STRIKE INSTANTLY, AS THE SETTLERS WATCHED HELPLESS!



MEANWHILE, BLACK DIAMOND AND BUMPER BITTERLY FIGHT AGAINST THE OVERWHELMING ODDS. BUT IT WAS LIKE BATTLING AN UNCONTROLLABLE FOREST FIRE... AS SOON AS ONE GANG WAS DESTROYED... THREE MORE SPRANG UP IN ITS PLACE! AS DIAMOND MAKES CAMP IN A PRAIRIE WATER HOLE, HE SEES...

FEED'S ON, DIAMOND...

HEY, BUMPER! COME LOOK! A HORSE AND RIDER COMING... LIKE THE DEVILS AFTER THEM!





GREAT GONNIES!
IT CAN'T
BE!

BUT IT IS,
BUMPER!
IT'S DAVY
CROCKETT!

HONDY, FRIENDS!
DIDN'T THINK YOU'D
READ MY BRAND...
THE WAY I'M
SCRATCHED UP...



DIAMOND REMOVES THE SLEEVE FROM THE FLUCKY
FRONTIERMAN'S 'SCRATCHED' ARM, TO FIND HE'S
SERIOUSLY WOUNDED...

WHAT IS
IT, DAVY...
TROUBLE?

WICKED TROUBLE, MARSHAL! THE
COUNTRY NEEDS YOUR HELP... AND
IT'S OUR BOUNDEN DUTY T STOP
THE VARMINT...



T STOP HIM FROM
RECRUITIN' AN OUTLAW
ARMY 'CROSS THE RIO
GRANDE IN MEXICO!

...ON MY WAY TO JOIN GEN'L GRANTS
ARMY, I STOPPED OFF FOR A SPELL IN
THE TOWN OF EL PASO. THERE WAS A
FEELIN' OF TENSION LING LIKE AN AP-
PROACHING TORNADO OVER THE WHOLE
PLACE! OUNDOOTS WERE GATHERIN' IN
THE STREETS BY THE HUNDREDS...



'BEARS LIKE FOLK'S ARE
WAITIN' FOR SOMETHIN'
TO HAPPEN!

EL PASO

THAT EVENIN' I MINGLED WITH THEM
TO MEET THE LEADER... AN HOMBRE
CALLED THE SCORPION!



...AND WE'LL LOOT AND SACK
EVERY TOWN IN THE WEST! WITH
THE COUNTRY AT WAR, THERE'S
NOTHING TO STOP US!
THERE'LL BE UNTOLD
GAINS FOR ALL OF
YOU! WE RIDE TO-
MORROW!

WHERE'LL
OUR FIRST
JOB BE,
SCORPION?



...I GUESS THAT KINDA MADE THE MARKED
HON BRE SUSPICIOUS...

LEAVE THE BRAINWORK TO ME,
FRONTIERSMAN! YOU'LL ALL DO
ALL RIGHT, IF YOU JUST
FOLLOW ORDERS!

SURE!
THAT'S FINE
WITH ME!



...CAUSE WHEN I TRIED TO OVERHEAR THEIR
PLANS...

...AFTER
WE TAKE
HARD
ROCK, WE...

STRANGER, IT'S PLUMB RUDE
AND DANGEROUS TO EAVESDROP
THAT WAY! I GUESS THE
SCORPION WAS RIGHT, HAVIN'
YOU WATCHED! GRAB SKY...



THEY'RE MET BY SUDDEN, SHARP GUNFIRE...

MAKE EVERY SHOT COUNT! WE'VE GOT TO BREAK THE CHARGE!



FALL BACK, MEN! WE'LL GET THEM ANOTHER WAY!



THE JOY OF THE TOWNSPEOPLE IS SHORTLIVED, AS A BURNING WAGON HURTLES INTO THEIR PATH...

THIS'LL WRECK THEIR PUNY BARRICADE...



DON'T PANIC! RETREAT FOR COVER!



THE FLAMING CONVEYANCE SPIRIVES, AND HURTLES ITSELF AGAINST THE BARRICADE WITH THE SUDDENNESS OF A THUNDERBOLT... THE BARRICADE GIVES WAY... AND THE OUTLAW ARMY STORMS IN...

FORWARD! TAKE EVERYTHING IN SIGHT, MEN...



BLACK DIAMOND AND SOME TOWNSPEOPLE HOLD WHAT'S LEFT OF THE FORT IN A HOTEL! SEEKING VENGEANCE FOR THE RESISTANCE, THE SCORPION ORDERS THE TOWN TO BE PUT TO THE TORCH...

WE HAVE EVERYTHING OF VALUE! DESTROY THE TOWN!

THOSE DOGGONE MAVERICKS ARE GOING TO FINISH US OFF!



LIKE A HORDE OF LOCUSTS WITH THEIR APPETITES SATIATED, THE GANG LEAVES... AND IN THEIR WAKE, DESTRUCTION AND DEATH...

NOTHING LEFT OF THE TOWN... BUT THE HOTEL WHERE WE MADE OUR LAST STAND!

MY POOR SON! WOUNDED... FOR NO REASON...



WITH HEAVY HEARTS, THE TOWN OF HARD ROCK BURIES ITS DEAD... AND BLACK DIAMOND MAKES A SOLEMN VOW OVER THE FRESH GRAVES...

I'LL STOP THOSE OWLHOOTS!



LATER THAT DAY, A WEARY, BUT DETERMINED BLACK DIAMOND ORGANIZES THE SETTLERS. BUT, DESPITE THEIR COURAGE, SUPERIOR NUMBERS WILL TELL... SO DIAMOND SEEKS AID FROM HIS OLD FRIEND GRAY EAGLE, CHIEF OF THE SHOSHONE...

MY PEOPLE WILL JOIN THE PALEFACES, TO RID OUR LAND OF THE OUTLAW SCOURGE!

THIS IS ONE ANGLE THE SCORPION DIDN'T FIGURE!



THE SETTLERS AND THE INDIANS MAKE A FORMIDABLE FOE! TOGETHER, THEY RELENTLESSLY TRACK THE SCORPION... FOLLOWING HIS TRAIL OF PLUNDER...

WE'LL GET HIM, BUMPER! ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS CROSS THIS VALLEY AND RUSH HIM!



STUDENLY THEY MEET AT RED FORK PASS! THE SETTLERS AND THE HARD-CHARGING, PRECISION-TRAINED SHOSHONE SWEEP ASIDE ALL RESISTANCE OF THE OUTLAW ARMY...



TRAPPED, THE OUT-NUMBERED AND OUT-GUNNED
WONKOOTO FIGHT A LOSING BATTLE...

I CAN'T FIGHT THE
WHOLE BLINKING WEST!
I'M CLEARING OUT OF
HERE!



AS BLACK DIAMOND AND BUMPER INSPECT THE
PRISONERS...

THE SCORPION'S GONE! IF
HE ESCAPES IT MAY BE WEEKS
BEFORE WE GET ANOTHER
CHANCE AT HIM! WE'VE
GOT TO FIND HIM!



AN INDIAN BRAVE PICKS UP THE TRAIL OF THE
OUTLAW CHIEF AND HIS TWO GUN-
RAMMERS!

HIM HIDING OUT
IN BARN! MUST
REPORT THIS TO
LAWMAN!



IN A BARN...? I SMELL
A TYPICAL SCORPION
TRICK! BUT, IF HE WANTS
TO PLAY HIDE-AND-SEEK,
I'LL PLAY WITH HIM!

THIS
TIME...
HE NO
GET
AWAY!



QUICKLY, THE BARN IS SURROUNDED...

C'MON OUT WITH YOUR
HANDS UP, SCORPION! I'M
GIVING YOU MORE OF A
CHANCE THAN YOU GAVE
THE PEOPLE AT HARD
ROCK!



A BURST OF GUNFIRE IS THE ONLY ANSWER...

YOU'LL NEVER
GET ME!



FOR AN HOUR, THE GUYS BARK OUT THEIR SHORT, DEADLY MESSAGES...

LET'S RUSH THEM!
THEY'RE OUT OF
AMMUNITION!

OKAY,
RATTLERS!
RAISE 'EM!

NOW WE'LL FIND OUT
WHO THE SCORPION
REALLY IS!

YOU'RE NOT SO MUCH OF A
TERROR WHEN THE
ODDS ARE EVEN, ARE
YOU, SCORPION?

HOW
COULD I
TELL
DIAMOND?

...WHEN I'M
**NOT REALLY
THE SCORPION!**
HE JUST USED
ME AS A DECOY...
TO GIVE HIM
TIME TO GET
OUT OF THE
TERRITORY!

WHAT DO YOU
THINK, DIAMOND...?
IS THAT OWLHOOT
OUR MANT

I CAN'T BE SURE,
BUMPER... BUT I DON'T
THINK SO! IF THE
SCORPION'S STILL
AROUND... I'LL LOOK
HORNS WITH HIM
AGAIN!

Bullets and Ballots

ONE OF OUR RIGHTS AS CITIZENS OF THIS GREAT LAND IS SELECTING OUR OFFICIALS BY OPEN PUBLIC ELECTIONS! BUT THERE ARE RUTHLESS MEN WHO LIVE OUTSIDE THE LAW, WHO HOPE TO TAKE OVER PUBLIC OFFICE FOR THEIR OWN DISHONEST PURPOSES! WHEN LUCKY CARSON, AN HONORABLE MAN WITHOUT A CONSCIENCE, TRIES TO CONTROL A TOWN AND TELL FOLKS WHO THEY CAN AND CAN'T VOTE FOR, THAT'S WHERE BLACK DIAMOND LENDS A HAND TO STOP THE EVIL FORCES OF LAWLESSNESS!

"HMMMPH!" THOSE MAVERICKS NEVER SAY ANYTHING, BUT IF YUH DON'T VOTE FOR THEIR CANDIDATE, SOMETHIN' MEAN ALWAYS HAPPENS TO YUH...AFTERWARDS!



FROM THE INCLINANT MAYOR OF PINE CITY, BLACK DIAMOND AND BUNKER GET SOME DISTURBING NEWS...

I'M WORRIED ABOUT THE ELECTION THAT'S COMING OFF IN THREE DAYS, MARSHALL. THERE'S A GOOD CHANCE I MAY LOSE! LUCKY CARSON IS SPREADING LOTS OF MONEY AROUND TO ELECT ED SLOCUM! IF HE WINS...PINE CITY WILL BECOME A HANGOUT FOR EVERY OUTLAW IN KANSAS!

BUT YOU'VE DONE A DAMN GOOD JOB IN OFFICE TOM! WHY WOULD ANYBODY WANT TO VOTE FOR SLOCUM AGAINST YOU?



IN FRONT OF THE TOWN HALL...

CARSON BROUGHT IN A GANG OF GUNSLINGERS TO INTIMIDATE FOLKS WHO WON'T GO ALONG WITH HIS MAN! GLOUM'S MAKING HIS MONEY SPEECHES NOW!

...AND WHEN I'M ELECTED, I'M GOING TO BUILD NEW SCHOOLS... ROADS...

I TELL YOU THIS WILL BE THE BIGGEST LITTLE TOWN IN THE WHOLE WEST!

WAIT UP SLOOGIM! WHERE WILL YOU GET THE MONEY TO BUILD THESE THINGS?

SHUT THAT YOKEL'S BIG MOUTH! HE'S ASKIN' TOO MANY QUESTIONS!

A WISE HOMBRE, EH? TRYIN' TO BUST UP A POLITICAL MEETIN'! YOU BETTER SHUT UP AND JUST LISTEN!

I'M ENTITLED TO ASK QUESTIONS BUT I RECKON THERE IS NO PLACE FOR ME...

THE CANDIDATE AIN'T THROUGH WITH HIS SPEECH YET! IT AIN'T POLITE TO LEAVE! I RECKON WE'LL JUST HAVE TO LEARN THIS HICK SOME MANNERS!

HEY! TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF ME!

IT'S TIME WE TOOK A HAND IN THIS BUMPER!

LEAVE THAT MAN ALONE, VARMINTS!

LET ME AT HIM! I'LL BREAK HIS... OOOFF!

ANOTHER HICK THAT NEEDS A LESSON IN MANNERS!

LOOK OUT, DIAMOND...HE'S DRAWING!

I'LL FIX THAT TIN-BADGE MARSHALL...

AS THE GUNMAN STARTS FOR HIS HOLSTER, BUMPER DRAWS AND...



SWIFTLY, LUCKY CARSON LEAPS TO THE PLATFORM...

THERE'S A LOT OF OWLHOOTS
HEADING FOR THIS TOWN JUST
BECAUSE HAWKINS IS IN OFFICE!
THEY'RE NOT SCARED OF HIM!
HE'S TAKING ORDERS FROM THEM!
I TELL YOU TO ELECT SLOCUM
AND MAKE THE OWLHOOTS
STAY OUT OF TOWN!

THAT'S AN
ORNERY LIE!
WE NEVER
HAD OUTLAWS
HERE BEFORE
YOU BROUGHT
THEM IN!



GET OFF THAT PLATFORM,
HAWKINS! WE DON'T WANT
TO HEAR YOUR HOGWASH!
WE WANT SLOCUM!

BOOOO!!



LIKE AN UNCOILING SPRING, BLACK DIAMOND
EXPLODES INTO MOTION TO STILL THE TROUBLE-
MAKERS...

HEY, MAYOR!
HERE'S A
LITTLE CAM-
PAIGN DONATION
FOR YOU...

BOOOO!
LET 'EM HAVE
IT, BOYS!

NO YOU
DON'T!



THIS IS ONE MEETING
YOU'RE NOT BREAKING
UP!

C'MON! LET'S HELP
DIAMOND THROW
THOSE VARMINTS
OUT!



AS THE HONEST TOWNSPEOPLE
JOIN IN THE FRACAS...

FLW INTO
EM! WE'VE
GOT 'EM
LICKED!

I'M
GETTIN'
OUTA
HERE!



THE OWLHOOTS ARE SOON ROUTED
AND ORDER IS RESTORED!

MARSHAL...
COME UP
HERE AND
SAY A FEW
WORDS!

IF THIS TOWN IS
GOING TO BE SAFE
FOR LAW ABIDING
CITIZENS, YOU MEN
WILL HAVE TO FIGHT
FOR YOUR RIGHTS!
I'M ASKIN' FOR
VOLUNTEERS!



THE FOLLOWING DAY, THE CITIZENS'
COMMITTEE GOES INTO ACTION WITH
BLACK DIAMOND AND BUMPER TO
LEAD THEM!

YOU DIDN'T BRING
YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS
TO THE SLOCUM
CAMPAIGN FUND,
SO...! HUH!

DROP THOSE
HOGLESS,
OWLHOOTS!
DROP 'EM
AND HIGHTAIL
OUT OF
HERE!





WE'LL DO JUST THAT!



WORD QUICKLY GETS TO CARSON ABOUT THE DARING STAND OF THE CITIZEN'S COMMITTEE!

DIAMOND'S GOT THEM ALL RILED UP, BOSS!

THINGS WERE GOING ALONG RIGHT WELL TILL HE HIT TOWN! WE HAD THE YOKELS ALL MIXED UP, AND NOW...!



WAIT A MINUTE! WE CAN STILL SWING THIS ELECTION! I'M GOING TO MAKE A SPEECH... AND WHAT A SPEECH IT'S GOING TO BE! GET A CROWD TOGETHER, BOYS!



LUCKY CARSON CALLS AN EMERGENCY MEETING AT THE TOWN HALL...

YOUR MAYOR'S GOING AROUND SAYING I'M BEHIND SLOCUM! WELL... HE'S RIGHT! I'M BEHIND ANYONE WHO RUNS AGAINST HAWKINS, AND I'LL TELL YOU WHY! HE SAID HE'D RUN ME OUT OF TOWN ON A RAIL UNLESS I GAVE HIM PART OWNERSHIP IN MY GAMBLING SYNDICATE! AND HERE ARE THE SIGNED DOCUMENTS TO PROVE IT!

DO YOU THINK THAT'S TRUE ABOUT HAWKINS?



CARSON'S LIES PASS LIKE WILDFIRE FROM MOUTH TO MOUTH, AND SOON BLACK DIAMOND FACED A CIRCLE OF GRIM-FACED CITIZENS...

HOW'S ABOUT THROWIN' A LITTLE LIGHT ON THIS STORY CARSON'S SPREADING ABOUT THE MAYOR, DIAMOND?

I'LL BE ABLE TO ANSWER YOU FOLKS AS SOON AS I GET AN ANSWER TO THIS TELEGRAM! PROBABLY AT THE ELECTION EVE RALLY TONIGHT!



MEANWHILE, IN CARSON'S OFFICE...

DIAMOND WILL PROVE THAT YOU WERE LYING, IF HE GETS A HANDWRITING EXPERT DOWN HERE!

HE'LL NEVER GET HERE! I'VE GOT A LITTLE STUNT UP MY SLEEVE...!



LATER THAT NIGHT IN DODGE CITY... AN UNSUSPECTING GOVERNMENT HANDWRITING EXPERT LOOKS EAGERLY INTO THE FACES OF HIS WAITING ESCORTS...

THE MARSHAL SENT US OVER TO GIVE YOU SAFE CONDUCT TO PINE CITY! THE HORSES ARE WAITING!

WHY, THANK YOU KINDLY! THAT'S RIGHT NICE OF THE MARSHAL!

YOU BOYS ARE GOING THE WRONG WAY! THIS ROAD DOESN'T LEAD TO FINE CITY!

WELL, AIN'T THAT A TERRIBLE MISTAKE! NOW SHUT UP, GOVERNMENT MAN, OR I'LL SHUT YOU UP PERMANENTLY! LET'S GO, LEM! WE'VE GOT TO GET HIM TO CABLE PASS!



BACK AT THE ELECTION EVE RALLY, THE BIG CROWDED ROOM HAD BEEN SILENT WITH EXPECTATION.

THE HANDWRITING EXPERT SHOULD HAVE BEEN HERE ALREADY! WHERE IS HE?

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU PEOPLE? DON'T YOU KNOW THAT THE GOVERNMENT MAN FROM DODGE CITY WILL NEVER GET HERE... HAWKINS WON'T LET HIM... HE KNOWS I TOLD YOU THE TRUTH!



THAT VARMINT HAS THE FOLKS ALL CONFUSED AGAIN!

SOMETHING MUST HAVE GONE WRONG. LET'S MOVEY OUTSIDE AND HAVE A LOOK AROUND!

CARSON MIGHT BE RIGHT!



LOOK AT 'EM ALL WAITING!

THEY'RE SURE GOING TO WAIT A LONG TIME... BECAUSE THE HANDWRITIN' MAN AIN'T SHOWIN' UP HERE TONIGHT!



OKAY, VARMINTS! START TALKING FAST! HOW COULD YOU KNOW HE WAS NOT GOING TO SHOW UP?

O... DON'T HIT ME! I'LL TALK PLENTY! CARSON HAD THE BOYS TAKE THE GOVERNMENT MAN OUT TO CABLE PASS!



AN HOUR LATER, DIAMOND ARRIVES AT THE PASS.

NOW TO GET TO THAT CABLE CAR ON THE OTHER SIDE! BUT IF I MOVE I, THEY'LL HEAR ME!



THE BATTLING MARSHALL'S STRATEGY IS CLEAR WHEN HE CLIMBS ON TO THE CABLE WITH ONLY A SLENDER ROPE HOLDING HIM UP...



THE NEXT MOMENT, THE DUMBFOUNDED OWLHOOT IN THE CABLE CAR IS PINNED BY THE WEIGHT OF THE LANDING CRIMEFIGHTER...

I RECKON YOU'LL HAVE TO PARDON ME FOR DROPPING IN ON YOU, UNINVITED!



I'LL CUT THAT CABLE! I'LL TAKE CARE OF BOTH OF THEM!



LUCKILY, DIAMOND AND THE GOVERNMENT MAN SCRAMBLE ON TO A LEDGE BEFORE THE CAR PLUNGES INTO SPACE...

THERE GOES THE CAR! IT WOULD HAVE BEEN THE END, IF NOT FOR YOU!

NO TIME TO THINK ABOUT THAT NOW! I HAVE TO GET TO PINE CITY BEFORE THE POLLS OPEN!



SHORTLY AFTERWARDS, BACK IN TOWN...

I DIDN'T SHOW UP LAST NIGHT BECAUSE CARSON'S GANG OF OUTLAWS KIDNAPPED ME AND HELD ME AT CABLE PASS! THE DOCUMENTS HE SHOWED YOU ARE FORGERIES!

NOW WE DON'T KNOW WHO TO BELIEVE!



BLACK DIAMOND KNOWS THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO CLEAR UP THE TOWN'S CONFUSION... AND SO, HE HEADS FOR LUCKY CARSON'S GAMBLING PALACE! AS CARSON AND HIS MEN COME CHARGING OUT...

YOU HOMERES AND I HAVE LOCKED HORNS FOR THE LAST TIME...



THE OUTLAWS START TO DRAW, BLACK DIAMOND'S GUNS SWEEP UP... THERE IS THE BULL THUD OF FALLING WEAPONS, WITH SMOOTH PRECISION, THE MARSHAL MOVES EFFORTLESSLY TO ACTION AND FIRES...

IT LOOKS LIKE YOUR ASSISTANTS ARE IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE THEMSELVES, CARSON!

NO... NO! WE'VE HAD ENOUGH!



ON THE WAY TO WAR, CARSON IS TAKEN TO THE TOWN SQUARE...

WHAT I TOLD YOU ABOUT MAYOR HAWKINS ISN'T TRUE! I FIGURED IF SLOCUM GOT INTO OFFICE, I COULD TAKE OVER THIS TOWN AND MAKE IT A HANGOUT FOR OUTLAWS AND GAMBLERS!

LET'S RE-ELECT MAYOR HAWKINS IN A LANDSLIDE!



THIEVES' END at GASPER GULCH

by "THE BLACK DIAMOND"



It was in the early summer of 1878, when Bumper and I, along with the help of Chief Young Crazy Fox, rounded up one of the cruelest and tightest little bands of cattle thieves ever to operate in Wyoming, before or after.

It's quite a mystery and story. I don't think we would have had any success at all if it weren't for our friend, Chief Young Crazy Fox, leader of a small group of Pawnees.

Around the little settlement of Five Sleep, stretching for miles in every direction, were some of the biggest cattle ranches of that period. Although there was an awful lot of dry desert in the area, there were miles of green and fertile grazing fields and enough water to keep the cattle from stampeding.

There wasn't much law and order in that part of the country. In fact, there wasn't any except what the ranchers took into their own hands. But there were plenty of cattle thieves, bandits, hold-up men and whatnot. There weren't any courts because there was no law and there were no judges. There weren't any bank robbers because there were no banks. There were no stagecoach robbers because none of the stagecoaches carried any gold, because there were no mines.

Just cattle — enormous herds of fine steers, strong enough and fat enough to be driven 800 miles to market and bring a fancy price.

The marauders in the area concentrated on stealing cattle, whole herds of 500 to 1,000 steers at a time. I was asked to break up the gang. This was a tough job, considering we had no help — just the two of us — Bumper and I.

While we were talking over the problem in the parlor of Mrs. Fay's Boarding House, a young Indian burst in to welcome us and say hello. He was Chief Young Crazy Fox, son of one of my best and oldest friends, the Pawnee Chief Thunder Gulch.

After greetings were exchanged, I outlined to Chief Young Crazy Fox our problem. He was very interested, offered his cooperation and suddenly came up with a most unusual idea.

Here was the plan. He would gather together a small party of his braves, pretend to attack the cattle thieves, then turn and run, hoping that the thieves would follow. "If the plan worked," he said, "and they followed, he would lead the rustlers down into Gasper Gulch."

At first, I didn't get the point at all. Of course, I didn't know the area very well. I never even heard of Gasper Gulch. And there are some strange workings of nature that are hard to believe, unless you see them with your own eyes. Who would have believed stories of the great geysers, of boiling mudflats or a great inland lake so salty that one could *not* sink in its waters! Who would have believed the story of Gasper Gulch, another baffling phenomenon of nature!

But I took the word of Chief Young Crazy Fox, and Bumper and I, together with a couple of ranchers from Five Sleep, rode out to the edge of Gasper Gulch and awaited developments, according to plan.

All of these murderous thieves certainly had it coming to them, but had I known their fate, bad as they were, I might have hesitated. All Chief Young Crazy Fox told me was to ride to the edge of the gulch and wait, but under no circumstances to descend into the valley.

After an hour or so, we saw a great cloud of dust across the plain, and then a bunch of Indians riding directly towards us. In pursuit were more than 30 horsemen, the cattle thieves who had been decoyed by Chief Young Crazy Fox and his braves. On and on they came, thundering hoofs that could be heard for miles around. The rustlers were firing from time to time, but the pace was so fast that their aim was poor. Suddenly, the Indians came right up to the gulch and down they went. Instantly however, they made a sharp turn and rode out single file into a narrow tunnel passageway.

Seconds later, the rustlers poured into the gulch and then stopped to look around for the Indians. They could see no exit. They felt that they were trapped, as one by one they fell off their horses onto the ground, just as if shot.

While Bumper and I were marveling at this strange happening, Chief Young Crazy Fox and his men rode up from behind us and told us that all of the bandits were dead by now. "You see," Black Diamond, "this gulch is a freak of nature," said Chief Young Crazy Fox. "There is almost no air in the gulch to breathe. Ten minutes trapped in this gulch and any human being will die from suffocation. Only those who know the secret exit can ride into the gulch and out and live."

Suddenly, Chief Young Crazy Fox gave a signal to his men and they again rode hard into the gulch. There was nothing I could do to stop them. Chief Young Crazy Fox stayed behind. He told us that if they rode fast enough, they could gather up the horses and lead them into the tunnel to safety. As he spoke they were gathering up the panting horses and pulling them into the tunnel.

"This is a terrible thing," I told the Chief. "What about those humans?"

"They were bad men," he replied. "They deserve to die. That is according to our Code, and it is we who did it. We have done it for you, but you can have no blame. There are no more cattle thieves anywhere in this part of the territory. The ranchers, their wives and children are safe."

What caused the lack of oxygen in the air at Gasper Gulch? No one has ever found out the cause of this phenomenon. But then what is the answer to so many other mysteries of nature?

'OH, GIVE ME A HOME WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM,' GOES THE SONG. LISTENING TO THAT KIND OF MUSIC, YOU MIGHT GET THE IDEA THAT ALL WAS PEACE AND TRANQUILLITY OUT IN THE OPEN SPACES AMONG THE TUMBLEWEED AND HILLS. RED FIRE THOUGHT SO TOO UNTIL THE DAY HE CROSSED PATHS WITH THE MASON BROTHERS... TWO OF THE MEANEST DRY GULCHERS YOU EVER WANT TO MEET UP WITH. RIDE THEN WITH RED FIRE AND SEE WHY HE SET OUT IN GRIM PURSUIT OF THE RUTHLESS OUTLAWS AND FINALLY GOT HIS...

'REVENGE at BLACK ROCK'

EARLY ONE SUNDAY MORNING AS RED FIRE WAS HEADING FOR THE RANCH OF HIS FRIEND JIM BRACKEN, WHO HAD INVITED HIM FOR DINNER.



HOLD ON THERE! GET THAT FIRE OUT, PRONTO!



RED FIRE



AS RED FIRE PUTS OUT THE FLAMES...



... HE HEARS A CRY FROM THE WOODSHED AND RELEASES HIS FRIENDS THE BRACKEN FAMILY.



A SHORT WHILE LATER AFTER
WAITING SEVERAL RANCHERS ON
HIS WAY TO BLACK ROCK



MEANWHILE ON THE OTHER SIDE
OF TOWN IN DOC HARRIS' OFFICE



DOC HAD NO CHOICE SO HE SWIFT-
LY PREPARED FOR THE OPERATION



THE MOMENTS PASS ON...



... AND WITH THEM THE LIFE OF
THE DYING OUTLAW!





BY THUNDER... THAT ONERY GUNHAWK GUNNED WHITE LIGHTNING DELIBERATELY!

WHITE LIGHTNING'S LEG IS BROKE, RED FIRE! THAT SIDEWINDER WANTED TO MAKE SURE YOU DIDN'T FOLLOW HIM!



DOC HARRIS VOLUNTEERED TO GIVE HIS PINTO TO RED FIRE SO THAT HE COULD TAKE UP THE TRAIL OF THE RUTHLESS TULLY MASON.

I'LL CATCH UP WITH THAT RATTLE-SNAKE!

GOOD LUCK TO YOU, RED FIRE... I'LL DO WHAT HAS TO BE DONE WITH WHITE LIGHTNING!



FOR DAYS THE DETERMINED RED FIRE TRAILED THE HORSE KILLER.



THEN ONE DAY...

GOT HIM!



RED FIRE FAKED BEING HIT WHEN HE HEARD THE SHOT AND QUICKLY PLANNED A SCHEME TO CAPTURE MASON.

RED FIRE GUESSED RIGHT.

THAT SHOT WAS TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT AND IF I KNOW MASON HE'LL BE HOT FOOTING IT DOWN HERE TO FINISH THE JOB!



THERE'S THAT CONSUMED KID. THIS'LL MAKE SURE HE'S GONNA BE TAKEN CARE OF!



AS SOON AS TULLY MASON EMPLOYED HIS SLUGS INTO THE BRUSH AT WHAT HE FOOLISHLY THOUGHT WAS RED FIRE HE GOT THE SURPRISE OF HIS LIFE.

WHAT THE... YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE DEAD!

SINCE YOU SHOT MY BOOTS FULL OF HOLES I'M SURE YOU'LL PARADON MY BARE FEET...



ALL RIGHT, KID... YOU GOT ME... GO AHEAD, AN SHOOT!

SHOOTING IS TOO GOOD FOR AN HOMERE LIKE YOU, MASON. I'M TAKING YOU BACK TO BLACK ROCK TO HANG FOR THE MURDERS YOU'VE COMMITTED!



...AND MY BARE HANDS!

A FEW DAYS LATER AFTER RED FIRE DELIVERED TULLY MASON TO THE SHERIFF AT BLACK ROCK...

HELLO, DOC. I JUST DROPPED BY TO SEE WHITE LIGHTNING'S GRAVE...

ALL RIGHT... RED FIRE... FOLLOW ME!



WHITE LIGHTNING! YOU'RE ALIVE!



B-BUT DOC, YOU SAID HIS LEG WAS BROKEN, DIDN'T YOU?

YES, BUT LUCKILY IT WASN'T A COMPLETE FRACTURE AFTER THE WAY YOU SAVED MY LIFE... I NURSED HIM NIGHT AND DAY... HE'LL LIVE!



SO... AS THE MAN IS BENT, THE BOY WILL CRY... ONLY THIS TIME THEY ARE TEARS OF HAPPINESS!



THE END



CAN THIS BE THE FEARLESS BLACK DIAMOND WE SEE RUNNING AWAY...? IS IT POSSIBLE THAT THE WESTERN CRIME FIGHTER WHOSE GUNS ECHO LIKE THUNDER ON THE SIDE OF JUSTICE HAS FINALLY MET HIS MATCH...? READ ON AND SEE WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES PLUNGE THE FAMOUS BACHELOR INTO A POSITION WHERE HE'D FACE A WOLF PACK OR THE WEST'S TEN WORST BADMEN, RATHER THAN SURRENDER TO THE WILES OF A ROMANTIC MINDED FEMALE TRYING TO CONVINCE HIM, HE'S...

The Marrying Kind



SURE ENOUGH, BUMPER, THERE'S SMOKE RISING FROM THE CHIMNEY! THIS IS A PIECE OF LUCK! WAIT TILL OLD SCARVES SEES US AGAIN!

SMELL THAT DEE-LICIOUS COFFEE? HOPE HE'S GOT SOME LEFT!

BILL, YOU OLD GOAT! HOW ARE THINGS UP IN THIS NECK OF THE WOODS?

DIAMOND! AND BUMPER... I AM I GLAD TO SEE YOU!



THINGS AREN'T TOO GOOD, I RECKON! SOME PESKY HOGS-THIEVIN' IS JUST ABOUT RUINING HALF THE RANCHES IN THIS VALLEY! EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE WE CATCH SOME OF THE OWL-HOOTS, BUT WE'VE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO GET A CLUE TO THE LEADER...

UNCLE BILL! SO THIS IS BLACK DIAMOND! HE'S SO HANDSOME! WHAT MUSCLES!

THIS IS MY NIECE, LUCY! SHE'S FROM BACK EAST!

ER... HOWDY, MA'AM! GUESS BUMPER AND I WILL BED DOWN IN THE BUNKHOUSE NOW!

OH, PLEASE! LET ME HELP YOU UNSADDLE!

I CAN HANDLE IT ALONG! IT'S NOT A WOMAN'S WORK!



BUT I INSIST ON HELPING! A WOMAN SHOULD HELP HER MAN! WHOOPS... I MUST'VE DROPPED YOUR BLANKET IN THE MUD!

THAT'S ALL RIGHT, MISS! I'LL GET IT.

IT'S MY FAULT... LET ME! OH, NOW I'VE DROPPED EVERY-THING!

PLEASE, LET ME HANDLE IT!

HAW! HAW! LOOKS LIKE YOU NEED SOME HELP, DIAMOND!



THE NEXT NIGHT, ON THE FRONT PORCH, DIAMOND WAS AGAIN CORNERED BY LUCY...

OH, THERE YOU ARE! I FEEL I OWE YOU AN APOLOGY AFTER THE WAY I ACTED YESTERDAY!

NO NEED FOR THAT, HARM! I HOLD NO GRIEVANCES AGAINST WOMEN!

LOOKS LIKE YOU'LL BE BUSY! SEE YOU, DIAMOND!



OF LUCY'S APOLOGY THREW HIM OFF BALANCE. HER NEXT MOVE CONFUSED HIM EVEN MORE! BEFORE THE MARSHAL KNEW WHAT WAS HAPPENING, A PAIR OF SOFT ARMS CLEFT AROUND HIS NECK.

ISN'T THE MOONLIGHT THRILLING?

HUH... OH, SURE...



WAIT! WHERE DID THOSE GUNSHOTS COME FROM?

OH, DARN! THERE WOULD BE TROUBLE NOW!

DIAMOND, SADDLE UP QUICK! THE RUSTLERS ARE IN THE NORTH PASTURE! THEY'RE MAKING OFF WITH THE HORSES!



I'LL SADDLE RELIAPON FOR YOU!

WELL, OKAY! IF YOU KNOW HOW...! BUT HURRY...



LUCY DOES HURRY, AND WHEN DIAMOND MOUNTS, DISASTER...

THE SADDLE'S SLIPPING...

I MUST'VE DONE SOMETHING WRONG AGAIN!



HE SUDDENLY FALLS... HITS HIS HEAD... AND BLACKNESS DESCENDS...



COMES TOO, A HALF HOUR LATER... IN LUCY'S ARMS...

OOOH... THE RUSTLER! I'VE GOT TO...

YOU POOR DARTING! HURT BECAUSE OF CLUMSY ME! TO...



GREAT GULLIES, DIAMOND! WHILE YOU WERE SHOOTING, THOSE SADDLE-TRAMPS MADE OFF WITH FIFTY HEAD OF CATTLE AND FIVE HORSES!



THE DAYS PASS... AND DIAMOND MAKES A DISTURBING OBSERVATION! HE'S SLOWLY BEING DRIVEN MAD BY LUCY'S UNWELCOME ATTENTIONS...

PLEASE, MISS LUCY! I'LL BUST IF I EAT ANOTHER HOTCAKE...

PLEASE, MISS LUCY! I'M TURNING IN FOR THE NIGHT! STOP TRAILING ME...

OH, NO! SHE SCORCHED MY LAST SHIRT!



ONE EVENING, HE MANAGES TO SLIP AWAY TO MAKE PLANS FOR ROUNDING UP THE RUSTLERS... GUESS WHO'S LISTENING IN INTENTLY...!

BUMPER AND I WILL RIDE AS TOP HANDS ON YOUR COLLECTED HERDS... AND THEN, IF THE RUSTLERS ATTACK, WE'LL NAIL THEM!

WHATEVER YUH SAY!



AND AS THE DAWN CUTS THROUGH THE SHADOWS OF THE LONG NIGHTS DIAMOND AND BUMPER WAIT PATIENTLY AT A NARROW MOUNTAIN PASS...

THAT GANG WILL HAVE TO COME THROUGH HERE BEFORE DAYBREAK!

THERE THEY COME! BOY WHAT A HAUL OF OWL-HOOTS THIS'LL BE!



IT'S THE LAW! LET'S SKEADADDLE, JAKE!

TOP AND JAKE BARRETT ROUND 'EM UP LIKE THE RUSTLING SNAKES THEY ARE!



YOU'RE NOT GOING ANY PLACE, BARRETT!

DON'T TRY 'N STOP ME, IF YUH WANTA KEEP YORE HIDE AIR-TIGHT!



WITH THE AGILITY OF A DEER, THE BRAVE LADYWAY SPRINGS
UPON HIS QUARRY...



AFTER TEMPORARILY SUBDUING BARRETT,
DIAMOND TURNS TO SEE LUCY...



PICKING UP A ROCK, SHE AIMS WILDLY...



YOU LEAVE DIAMOND ALONE! OH,
I'VE HIT THE WRONG HEAD...



DIAMOND COMES TO... IN LUCY'S ARMS AGAIN...



WELL, WE GOT MOST
OF THEM... EVEN IF
BARRETT DID GET
AWAY!

THE NEXT DAY, A SURPRISE VISITOR FROM BACK
EAST, ARRIVES AT THE SOARIES RANCH...



FOR THE FIRST TIME IN SIX
YEARS... I'VE KNOWN WHAT
A REAL HE-MAN'S LIKE! I'LL
NEVER MARRY YOU, HENRY!

BUMPER DIAMOND SEIZES THE OPPORTUNITY AND CATCHES UP TO THE DEJECTED AND JILTED HENRY...

LOOK, ARE YOU REALLY SERIOUS ABOUT MARRYING THIS GAL?

I'VE BEEN SERIOUS FOR SIX YEARS! BUT YOU HEARD... SHE WANTS A REAL WESTERN HE-MAN... LIKE YOU!



IF SHE THOUGHT YOU WERE A HERO, THAT MIGHT CHANGE HER MIND!

I GUESS IT WOULD... BUT ANYONE CAN PLAINLY SEE I'M NOT THE HERO TYPE!



I THINK I CAN FIX THAT! TOD BARRETT'S HIDING OUT IN THE HILLS! IF WE GO UP THERE AND CAPTURE HIM, BUMPER CAN CONVENIENTLY SHOW UP WITH LUCY JUST AS YOU'RE HOLDING A GUN ON THIS RESPERADO!

IT'S A DANDY IDEA... BUT IS IT FAIR?

IF YOU WANT TO MARRY THIS GAL... ALL'S FAIR IN LOVE AND WAR!



LATER, AT BARRETT'S HIDEOUT...

YOU WAIT OUT HERE! I'LL DISARM HIM AND CALL YOU!



ARE YOU READY TO TANGLE WITH ME AGAIN, BARRETT?

SURE, MARSHAL! ALWAYS WILLIN' TO OBLIGE...



PROP 'EM, DIAMOND OR GET VENTILATED!

SO YOU HAD ANOTHER RATTLER BEHIND THE DOOR!

TOD BARRETT ALWAYS HAS AN ACE IN THE HOLE!





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